



The primary operational TBI component of the Defense Centers of Excellence for Psychological Health and Traumatic Brain Injury

Brainwaves

DVBIC Brainwaves • Spring 2011

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Message From

Jamie B. Grimes, MD

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National Director, DVBIC



One of the most inspiring opportunities I've had as DVBIC National Director is serving on the tri-service, multi-agency Gray Team,

which seeks to improve TBI care of service members in-theater. For this 2011 mission, ADM Michael Mullen, chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, charged the Gray Team with examining advances in TBI care in Afghanistan since the team's first two trips (I and II) in 2009. DVBIC has been a member of the Gray Team, and U.S. Central Command has been a partner, since its inception.

Our group of 12 physicians, researchers and technology experts traveled to theater on a non-stop Boeing 777 flight to Qatar on an icy January morning. Among us were officers from the Army, Air Force, and Navy and civilian TBI experts from UCLA, Washington University in St. Louis, and Banyan Corp. Also joining the Gray Team for the first time was Dr. Kathleen Quinkert, special assistant to GEN Peter Chiarelli, vice chief of staff of the U.S. Army. During our seven days in-theater, we traveled by aircraft, bus, car and even a MAX Pro MRAP to visit Bagram Air Field and Combat Support Hospital (CSH), Forward Operating Base Sharana, Close Operations Post (COP) Rushmore, Kandahar CSH/Role III, Camp Leatherneck and Bastion CSH/Role III.

Gray Team III looked closely at many issues, including TBI pre-deployment education and training of personnel, from medics to CSH staff. We wanted to ensure that first-line medics and corpsmen are getting the care and resources they need, and that they know about and are implementing TBI clinical practice guidelines. We also looked at Internet connectivity issues that affect in-theater providers' ability to update electronic medical records, and we worked with line and medical leaders on enforcement of directive type memorandum (DTM) 09-033, which includes reporting

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Help Raise Brain Injury Awareness This Month

DVBIC's 16 regional education coordinators (RECs) provide education on TBI prevention, treatment and rehabilitation across the DVBIC network of nine military medical centers, five Veterans Affairs (VA) hospitals and two civilian sites. And at no time are they busier than March—Brain Injury Awareness Month.

Here are highlights of some of their outreach activities to service members (Active Component, Guard, and Reserve), veterans, families and community groups:

- **Fort Carson:** REC Robin Winingar has recorded an interview on concussion and DVBIC resources with local radio stations KILO and RXP.

The stations will play the interviews throughout this month. The interviews, recorded by Winingar for the past three years, spur a high volume of calls from veterans.

- **Landstuhl, Germany:** Karen Williams is coordinating six concussion presentations, held March

29-31, to 150 fourth-grade students at Vogelweh Elementary School in Kaiserslautern. The sessions, presented by TBI experts, will cover the brain's function, brain safety with an "egg-drop" display (with and without a helmet) and the proper fitting of a helmet.



- **Palo Alto/Camp Lejeune:** REC Jill Storms of the Palo Alto VA and REC Deborah Waun of Camp Lejeune are running community college workshops—Waun's March 9 at Coastal Carolina Community College in Jacksonville, N.C., and Storms's March 18 at the Palo Alto VA, in partnership with the War Related Illness and Injury Study Center. The

Coastal Carolina workshop addresses TBI and post-traumatic stress disorder considerations when returning to school. The Palo Alto workshop educates community college faculty members and counselors on mild TBI.

To learn more about awareness-raising activities across the DVBIC network, visit www.DVBIC.org.



Providers: Get Your Toolkit on Mild TBI and Co-occurring Disorders

Primary-care providers seeking guidance on care of service members with TBI and co-morbidities can tap a new clinical resource: the *Co-occurring Conditions Toolkit: Mild Traumatic Brain Injury and Psychological Health*. Developed by the Defense Centers of Excellence for Psychological Health and Traumatic Brain Injury with input from numerous other DoD agencies, including DVBIC, the toolkit focuses on care of patients with co-occurring mild traumatic brain injury and psychological health conditions.

Providers currently use five DoD/VA clinical practice guidelines (CPGs) in the areas of concussion, post-traumatic stress disorder, depression, chronic opioid therapy and substance use disorder. The *Co-occurring Conditions Toolkit* coordinates information from these five CPGs

and will help providers care for service members who need treatment for two or more of these conditions at the same time.

Included in the toolkit are:

- Tips for structuring a successful first appointment.
- Guidance on assessment and treatment of symptoms associated with, for example, sleep, mood, attention and chronic pain.
- Comprehensive medication tables, including contraindications and polypharmacy red flags.
- Patient education tips and resources.

To order your copy of the toolkit, write to info@dvbic.org or call 1-800-870-9244.

A **traumatic brain injury (TBI)** is caused by a blow/jolt to the head or penetrating head injury that disrupts the normal function of the brain. Not all blows/jolts to the head result in a TBI. TBI severity may range from **mild** (a brief change in mental status or consciousness) to **severe** (an extended period of unconsciousness or amnesia after injury). The terms **concussion** and **mild TBI** are interchangeable.

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and evaluating mandatory events that may cause TBI in service members.

One highlight for me was riding with the Task Force Predator Route Clearance Crew to COP Rushmore, where we heard first-hand from 101st soldiers about past and recent concussion experiences, especially with DTM mandates. We also talked with command and the unit physician assistant and his five medics about concussion care at the COP using the latest clinical tools (i.e., Military Acute Concussion Evaluation, TBI clinical practice guidelines) and the online Electronic Medical Record (MC4) system.

Everyone we met on our journey showed openness and commitment to pushing TBI advances to best care for service members. I left with a homework assignment: 1.) envision a DVBIC Forward Team to assist with standardized pre-deployment training and education and 2.) collaborate with in-theater providers on follow-up with service members who return to duty in-theater after concussion treatment in Afghanistan. At present, clinical treatment paradigms are somewhat different across the various in-theater Concussion Centers. DVBIC looks forward to working on this assignment.



Site Profile: At Fort Carson, No Soldier Left Untrained



At DVBIC's Fort Carson site in Colorado, a major focus is educating service members, families, and the community about TBI. The Army installation hosts active duty service members, as well as those in the Army Reserve, Navy Reserve, and Colorado Army and Air National Guard.

Fort Carson's two education coordinators, Robin Winingar and Tami Clark, work to keep these men and women informed about TBI before and after they deploy.

For instance, at pre-deployment fairs, education coordinators give service members some basic DVBIC materials on TBI, and they give line leaders and medics a primer on appropriate TBI reporting and treatment in-theater.

The coordinators ramp up their education efforts when service members return, offering them and their family members a 15- to 30-minute TBI informational session during reintegration training or mandated Army TBI training.

In addition, they teach classes for service members diagnosed with TBIs and their families:

- **Back to Basic, 60 minutes**

Offered three times a month in three different locations, this class is taught with information from a speech and language pathologist. Service members are referred by TBI providers, and a Warrior Recovery Center administrator notes their attendance in medical records.

- **Beyond the Basic, 30 minutes**

Offered twice a month at the USO building on post, this class provides strategies for coping with concussive symptoms. Pill boxes, note pads with pens and to-do list magnets are given out to attendees.

Fort Carson's education coordinators are especially busy when a large group returns from deployment. In late February, for example, 4,000 soldiers with the 4th Infantry Division returned from Iraq; to keep up with demand, Winingar and Clark are holding TBI classes every week day in the month of March at the Deployment Health Clinic. The reintegration classes will be taught every day for six weeks when the main body returns.

The coordinators have also stepped up their attention to Reserve and Guard soldiers, who may not receive the same level of TBI education as active-duty troops. To reach more of these soldiers and their families, they've been hitting Reserve and Guard Yellow Ribbon events in Denver, Keystone, Colo., and other locations with the 88th Regional Support Command.

Winingar and Clark estimate that they reach 3,000 service members each month. Their catchment region includes Colorado, Idaho, Montana, New Mexico, Utah and Wyoming.

TBI Guide Available for Caregivers



Family members and friends who care for service members who have sustained a moderate, severe or penetrating TBI may feel alone or helpless at times. And that's where

the DoD and DVBIC aim to help with a recently issued resource: *Traumatic Brain Injury: A Guide for Caregivers of Service Members and Veterans*.

The guide originated from a congressional mandate in Section 744 of the 2007 National Defense Authorization Act. The mandate directed the DoD to establish a panel to develop curricula for family members on providing TBI care. The panel included TBI experts, caregivers and representatives from the DoD, VA and Department of Health and Human Services.

Numerous DoD and VA agencies approved the guide and its four-module curriculum, and the panel that developed it unanimously recommended that DVBIC maintain and disseminate it.

Caregivers can receive print versions of the guide from health care providers who've been trained on distributing the curriculum. Caregivers may also download the guide from the Center of Excellence for Medical Multimedia's web site at www.TraumaticBrainInjuryAtoZ.org.

The guide's modules are written on an eighth-grade reading level and are focused as follows:

- **Module 1: Introduction to TBI, including mechanisms and sites of injury.**
- **Module 2: Understanding effects of TBI and what you can do to help.**
- **Module 3: Unique needs of family caregivers of service members and veterans with TBI.**
- **Module 4: Navigating military and veterans' services and benefits systems.**

Those interested in receiving the guide should contact their local TBI health care clinic or Ms. Shealyn Holt, family caregiver coordinator at DVBIC national headquarters, at fcg@dvbic.org.

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